

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0978

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV PDIP ECON MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - SEPTEMBER 9

REF: PORT LOUIS 947

SUMMARY: PORT LOUIS 0977 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE.
END SUMMARY.

1. GUY OLLIVRY, LEADER OF THE UNION DEMOCRATIQUE MAURICIENNE (UDM), GENERATED A ROUND OF EDITORIAL COMMENTARY IN THE MEDIA WHEN HE PROVIDED HIS ANALYSIS TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE IN A WIDELY PUBLICIZED PRESS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 2. POINTING TO THE SOFRES SURVEY RESULTS WHICH INDICATED THAT A MAJORITY OF MAURITIANS FAVORED SOCIALISM, OLLIVRY MAINTAINED THAT NEITHER MAJOR PARTY IN THE LIGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY REFLECTED THIS IDEOLOGY. LABOR, HE SAID, REPRESENTED THE "BIG INTERESTS," WHILE THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) ESPOUSED COMMUNISM AND MARXISM. FURTHERMORE, IN AGREEING TO THE WAGE INCREASE PACKAGE, LABOR AND MMM HAD ARRIVED AT A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY DEAL WHICH WAS NOT VENEFICIAL TO THE WORKERS. TO OLLIVRY THIS WAS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT THE MMM AND THE
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GOVERNING ALLIANCE WRE ANGLING TOWARD THE FORMATION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT. OLLIVRY CALLED UPON ALL TRUE SOCIALIST FORCES TO RALLY BEGIND THE UDM IN ORDER TO TRANSLATE THIS PREDOMINANT AND POPULAR FORCE INTO POLITICAL REALITY.

2. AN INTERVIEW WITH MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) LEADER GAETAN DUVAL IN THE NEWSPAPRR, WEEK-END,

OF SEPTEMBER 4, SEEMED TO LEND WEIGHT TO THE IDEA THAT A COALITION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE AND THE MMM MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. DUVAL STATED THAT IF THE MMM WANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COALITION (LABOR AND PMSD), AND RECOGNIZED THAT THE TONE AND SUBSTANCE OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES WOULD NOT BE ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE CURRENT POLICIES, THE PMSD WOULD NOT HAVE ANY REASON TO OBJECT TO THE PRESENCE OF MMM MINISTERS IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE NEXT DAY AT A PMSD RALLY, DUVAL REPEATED, THIS TIME WITHOUT ANY QUALIFIERS, THAT HIS PARTY WOULD NOT OPPOSE THE MMM'S PRESENCE INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT.

3. IN THE SAME EDITION OF THE WEEK-END, BERENGER, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MMM, ADHERED TO HIS PREVIOUS POSITION OF SPURNING AN ALLIANCE WITH LABOR. (THE NEXT DAY THE MMM'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE RECONFIRMED BERENGER'S POSITION.) HE POINTED TO THE SOFRES SURVEY RESULTS WHICH BORE OUT HIS VIEW THAT THE MMM WOULD COME TO POWER BY MAJORITY VOTE IN THE FUTURE. "UNLESS HE HAS BECOME COMPLETELY SENILE, THE PRIME MINISTER MUST KNOW THAT TIME IS AGAINST HIM," BERENGER SAID. HE ADDED THAT HIS PARTY WAS NOT IN A HURRY TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT, AND WOULD LET TIME WORK IN ITS BEHALF.

4. APPARENTLY UNPERTURBED BY BERENGER'S COMMENTS, RAMGOOLAM IN A SPEECH ON SEPTEMBER 5 TO A GROUP OF SENIOR CITIZENS, SPOKE OF THE NECESSITY FOR "ALL PARLIAMENTARIANS TO JOIN
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TOGETHER UNDER THE SAME HAT." COMMENT: IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS THE PRIME MINISTER IS PROMOTING MORE THAN EVER HIS IDEA OF CREATING A "GRAND ALLIANCE" IN WHICH ALL MAJOR PARTIES -- LABOR, PMSD, AND MMM -- WILL JOIN TOGETHER FOR THE "COMMON GOOD, PROSPERITY, AND DEVELOPMENT" OF MAURITIUS. END COMMENT.

5. AN OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE CONCERNING THE HEALTH OF PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM WAS RELEASED ON SEPTEMBER 2. IT STATED THAT THREE EMINENT PHYSICIANS HAD EXAMINED RAMGOOLAM AND HAD FOUND NOTHING "ALARMING OR ABNORMAL" ABOUT HIS STATE OF HEALTH. THEY ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT IN VIEW OF SIGNS OF EXCESSIVE FATIGUE, HE SHOULD SLOW DOWN FOR A WHILE.

6. BUT SLOWING DOWN DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ON RAMGOOLAM'S CURRENT PRIORITY LIST. THE PRIME MINISTER DEPARTED MAURITIUS SEPTEMBER 7 FOR PARIS WHERE HE WILL MEET WITH PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING. HIS BUSY ITINERARY ALSO INCLUDES LONDON, COPENHAGEN, AND WASHINGTON, PRIOR TO HIS SCHEDULED APPEARANCE IN NEW YORK BEFORE THE UNGA ON SEPTEMBER 27.

7. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON SEPTEMBER 7 BERENGER DEMANDED

THAT ALL PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS BE NATIONALIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT. REFERRING TO LE MILITANT'S EXPOSE OF THE SCANDAL SURROUNDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FREE SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAM (REFTEL), BERENGER SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE DIRECT CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS IN ORDER TO STOP THE GRAFT AND ABUSES BEING PERPETRATED ON THE PUBLIC CURRENTLY. "EIGHT MONTHS OF SCANDAL IS ENOUGH," HE DECLARED.

8. IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHIEF NEGOTIATOR FOR THE UNION OF BUS INDUSTRY WORKERS (UBIW) PAUL BERENGER ALSO CALLED FOR THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM. APPEARING ON SEPTEMBER 7 BEFORE A PUBLIC COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO STUDY THE TRANSPORT PROBLEM, BERENGER PROPOSED SETTING UP A SINGLE QUASI-AUTONOMOUS PUBLIC CORPORATION THAT WOULD OWN AND CONFIDENTIAL

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OPERATE THE BUS SYSTEM. THE NUMEROUS PRIVATE COMPANIES WHICH NOW EXIST WOULD BE ABSORBED INTO THE NATIONAL CORPORATION, THAT IN TURN WOULD BE CONTROLLED BY A BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMPOSED PARTLY OF WORKERS. FAILING A DECISION TO CREATE THIS PUBLIC CORPORATION, A SINGLE PRIVATE COMPANY SHOULD BE FORMED, HE BELIEVED, TO BRING MORE EFFICIENCY AND ORDERLINESS TO THE ENTIRE SYSTEM.

9. THE MMM'S OPPONENTS RECEIVED SOME SATISFACTION THIS WEEK WHEN THE PARTY'S NEWSPAPER WAS FORCED TO EAT HUMBLE PIE. FACED WITH A DEFAMATION SUIT IN WHICH THE CURRENT MINISTER OF JUSTICE CHONG LEUNG WAS DEMANDING DAMAGES OF RS 200,000, LE MILITANT AND ITS EDITOR DECIDED TO OFFER APOLOGIES AND PAY RS 39,000 IN DAMAGES AND COURT COSTS. THE SUIT AROSE OUT OF AN ARTICLE THE PAPER PUBLISHED ON DECEMBER 31, 1976, IN WHICH CHONG LEUNG WAS SAID TO BE "UNFIT TO BE A MINISTER OF JUSTICE AS HIS INTEGRITY WAS DOUBTED BY CERTAIN PEOPLE." LE MILITANT AGREED, IN ADDITION, TO PUBLISH ITS APOLOGY IN ITS SEPTEMBER 6 EDITION AS WELL AS IN TWO OTHER PORT LOUIS DAILIES.

10. TO TOP OFF A WEEK MARKED BY AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT OF PUBLIC POLITICAL EXCHANGES -- HERVE MASSON, SR., WHO RESIGNED RECENTLY FROM THE MMM'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOLLOWING A CENSURE MOTION PASSED AGAINST HIM, LEVELLED SOME PARTING SHOTS AT THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP AS HE PREPARED TO LEAVE MAURITIUS INDEFINITELY FOR FRANCE. IN AN INTERVIEW IN LE MAURICIEN, MASSON PREDICTED THE DEMISE OF THE MMM UNLESS ITS LEADERS RETURNED THE PARTY TO ITS TRUE SOURCE OF POWER: THE WORKING CLASS. THE MMM, HE CHARGED, HAD TURNED AWAY FROM THE IDEOLOGICAL FORCE OF "CLASS STRUGGLE" AND HAD BECOME DOMINATED BY A BOURGEOIS ELEMENT. AS A CONSEQUENCE IT HAD LOST THE DECEMBER 1976 ELECTION. THE CURRENT TALK OF A CONFIDENTIAL

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MMM/LABOR/PMSD COALITION NATURALLY AROSE, HE SAID, BECAUSE OF THE MMM'S COLLABORATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN SO MANY INSTANCES ON KEY ISSUES, SUCH AS IN THE SELECT COMMITTEE'S WAGE INCREASE AGREEMENT. HE CONCLUDED THAT ONLY A PROFOUND INTERNAL SHAKEUP COULD SAME THE MMM.

11. IN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE AREA, TWO FOREIGN COMMERCIAL MISSIONS VISITED MAURITIUS THIS WEEK. A SWEDISH DELEGATION HELD TALKS ON SEPTEMBER 6 WITH THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A TEXTILE MILL IN THE INDUSTRIAL ZONE. A DAY EARLIER A TRADE DELEGATION FROM TANZANIA LED BY ITS FOREIGN COMMERCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CHIEF, MET WITH GOM TRADE EXPERTS TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING FORMAL COMMERCIAL TIES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE TALKS WERE REPORTED TO BE PRELIMINARY, IN PREPARATION FOR A LARGER TRADE MISSION THAT WOULD ARRIVE LATER TO FINALIZE AN ACCORD.

12. CONSUMERS' MORALE WAS GIVEN A BOOST THIS WEEK WHEN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE ON SEPTEMBER 7 ANNOUNCING THAT AS OF SEPTEMBER 12 RICE IMPORTED UNDER THE GOVERNMENT'S SUBSIDY PROGRAM WILL BE SOLD TO THE PUBLIC FOR 36 CENTS PER HALF KILO. REPRESENTING A REDUCTION OF 12CENTS PER HALF KILO FROM THE PREVIOUS PRICE, THE MEASURE WILL BE WIDELY POPULAR SINCE RICE IS ONE OF THE DIETARY STAPLES OF THE ISLAND. THE GOVERNMENT ASSURED MERCHANTS THAT CORRESPONDING ADJUSTMENTS IN WHOLESALE PRICES WILL BE MADE TO MAINTAIN PROFIT MARGINS OF WHOLESALERS AND RETAILERS AT THEIR CURRENT LEVEL.
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